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## HIGHER EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA

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Striking contrasts and unexpected similarities between home and foreign practices form the basis of observation when one begins to investigate foreign institutions. Considering that this address must cover a wide area in a short time, I have constructed it in its main lines upon the principle of comparison, feeling that whether I did so or not, my hearers would consciously or unconsciously apply this principle. The first comparison involves the definition of "Higher Education." In the United States, as the term is applied, it is commonly considered as embracing the independent college or the department of arts, science and philosophy in the university, the graduate school, which is a continuation of the college, and the professional schools of law, theology, medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, engineering, education, agriculture, and in later years, commerce. All studies in these professional schools have been designated as higher education although formerly a secondary school diploma was not uniformly a prerequisite to admission, and unfortunately, it is not yet everywhere demanded.

In Latin America, higher education is confined almost exclusively to the professional schools of law, medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, engineering, agriculture, education and commerce. In many states, however, the schools of agriculture, education and commerce are not there classed as parts of higher education. Only two or three countries retain in their universities the department of letters and philosophy. Strictly speaking, there is no graduate school. Schools of art and music are not an integral part of the university organization, but are everywhere subsidized by the government and enjoy a prestige not usually accorded to such institutions in the United States. Higher education

in Latin America is, therefore, almost wholly professional education, and to these professional colleges, admission is gained directly from the secondary school as in Continental Europe. Full secondary education is, however, absolutely required for admission to the traditional liberal professions, and also to those of more recent creation, such as agriculture, commerce, etc., when these form part of the university.

#### FACILITIES

A Latin-American university is, therefore, only a group of professional schools. Naturally there is little cohesion or unity. In some countries, such as Brazil, Bolivia and Guatemala, there is no university organization; the schools of law, medicine, etc., are separate institutions, dependent directly upon the government and answerable directly to the minister of public instruction. Moreover in the countries that have the university organization, many provincial universities have but two faculties—as law and pharmacy. In speaking of the facilities for higher education in Latin America, it will be more practical, therefore, to group together the schools of a single profession than to cite the number and names of the universities. At the time of my investigations in 1911–12, there were approximately sixty-eight law schools in Latin America, distributed as follows: one each in Cuba, Haiti, Santo Domingo, Guatemala, Salvador, Costa Rica and Uruguay; nineteen in Mexico; four in Columbia; three in Venezuela; four in Ecuador; three in Nicaragua; four in Peru; four in Bolivia; four in Chile four in Argentina; ten in Brazil. Of medicine there were thirty-two, distributed as follows: one each in Cuba, Haiti, Santo Domingo, Guatemala, Salvador, Honduras, Peru, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay; two each in Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentine and Venezuela; three each in Columbia and Brazil; seven in Mexico. Nearly every medical college contains also the departments of pharmacy and dentistry. Of engineering there were fifteen colleges, distributed as follows: one each in Cuba, Mexico, Columbia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru and Uruguay; two in Chile; three in Argentine; four

in Brazil. Of agriculture there were fourteen: one each in Cuba, Mexico, Honduras, Venezuela, Peru, Bolivia and Uruguay; two each in Chile, Argentine and Brazil.

Only Cuba, Chile and Argentine have colleges of education, and only Argentine, Bolivia and Mexico have colleges of commerce. I distinguish between a school and a college as applied to the departments of education, commerce and agriculture, etc., on the basis of entrance requirements, a "college" demanding the full secondary education for admission, a "school" having lower requirements. Practically all countries have schools of commerce and agriculture as well as normal schools and some are admirable of their type but few countries offer higher education in commerce and education.

Theological education for the Roman Catholic church is given in the diocesan seminaries and is relatively elementary. The archbishop may maintain a *gran seminario* in which the studies reach higher levels. A few of the old universities continue the traditional faculty of theology, but the number of students is negligible.

The college of liberal arts as a separate institution does not exist anywhere in Latin America (except possibly at Bogota and MacKenzie College at São Paulo in Brazil) and only the universities of Peru, Cuba and Argentine retain the departments of philosophy and letters.

#### EQUIPMENT

The matter of equipment in the institutions of Latin America is very unequal and there is even a large disparity in the equipment of the different colleges of the same university. In the mere matter of buildings, no South American University has suitable and adequate buildings throughout. As most of the institutions are of comparatively ancient foundation, they have inherited the colonial quarters, which were copies of the monastic universities of mediaeval Europe, while the institutions of more recent establishment have been compelled often through poverty to content themselves with hired buildings. Of the larger and more cele-

brated universities, only those of La Plata and Uruguay have all their departments housed in edifices that post-date the colonial era. Buenos Aires has distinctly modern buildings for the colleges of medicine and agriculture. The college of law is established in an ancient property to which have been added in time newer lecture halls and a library. The college of letters and philosophy occupies a building which was formerly a residence, while the college of engineering occupies a block of buildings erected at different epochs and for different purposes, one of the chemical laboratories being installed in the chapel of a colonial convent. As regards buildings, the University of Chile may be taken as typical of the varied material equipment of a good Latin-American university. The medical college has a building erected especially for it some forty years ago. It is dignified in appearance and relatively adequate. The dental college (which however in Chile is not a part of the university organization), has a thoroughly modern structure. The engineering college occupies a good building some fifty years old. It was constructed to accommodate the whole university of that day. It is consequently not well adapted to its present uses. The law college has to content itself with a hired building which was once a residence. The same is true of the college of architecture.

In nearly all countries the medical schools are the most favored in the matter of buildings. Even in the smaller countries, this department has been given relatively modern buildings and good facilities for the prosecution of its work. Next in order of commodious quarters comes the engineering college. Its work, so largely laboratory in character, has incited the erection of suitable buildings. The agricultural colleges, being very recent and demanding larger grounds for experimental work, have drifted to the suburbs away from the crowded conditions of the older departments. The colleges of law and of letters have been and are still the least favored.

The libraries are not as extensive or as rich as the great age of many universities would lead one to expect. This is explained in part by the fact that in the colonial period

the institutions were strictly ecclesiastical and their work was almost exclusively theological, or preparatory to theological studies. The university library of that time comprised, therefore, only classical and theological works. Another explanation is the fact that the chief universities are located at the national capitals and every country has its national library, which has often been developed at the expense of the university library.

The striking feature of the university libraries is the large number of works in languages other than the national language. It is true that Spain has not nearly kept pace with her European neighbors in scientific studies and scientific production. The Spanish-American countries have not yet produced many original scientific works themselves, and have, therefore, been forced to have recourse to foreign literatures for the materials of advanced study. This is unfortunate, as it unconsciously gives a tinge of depreciation to the national idiom as a vehicle of learning. French scientific books form the great majority of the library collections and are also much used as regular texts. This arises from the historic prestige of the French language and the ease with it is acquired by other Latin peoples. Of the works consulted by students and professors in the library of the medical college of Montevideo in a recent year, 154 were in German, 231 in Portuguese, 239 in English, 1243 in Italian, 2793 in Spanish and 5816 in French.

Laboratory equipment is fairly adequate to the demands made upon it. Unfortunately, from a North American viewpoint, the Latin-American practice fails to make the fullest use of the laboratory. As a rule, it is used simply for demonstrations by the instructor in the presence of the class and not for frequent individual experiment by each and every student. Hence one of the greatest advantages of laboratory studies is lessened. Particularly is this true in engineering and agricultural schools. In medical schools, more individual use is made of the equipment. Many Latin-American educators admit the inadequacy of the mere demonstration method in laboratory, and the best universities

are changing their practice in this respect; but the advance in engineering schools is greatly hampered by tradition.

The lack of better buildings must not be attributed to indifference to higher education. The Latin-American takes an exceptional pride in handsome public buildings and in the material aspect of the universities. In some countries, the rapid growth of the population has so increased the university enrollment that the public revenues have been inadequate to the demands made upon them. Buenos Aires has as many thousands in her university today as she had hundreds thirty years ago.

In states where immigration has not been marked, the reorganization of higher education in the past two decades in order to adapt it to the new scientific era has exhausted the available resources.

There is scarcely a country, large or small, rich or poor, that has not built and equipped its institutions of higher learning as well and as fast as it could well afford. Some have been even too lavish here in proportion to the expenditures for elementary and secondary education.

#### ORGANIZATION

Latin-American universities are more closely related to and more dependent upon the political powers of the country than is the case with North American state universities. They are, however, in name almost universally autonomous, i.e., the professors constitute a corporation that is self-perpetuating. Vacant professorships are filled by the faculty itself. The control of the state resides in the fact that the chief executive, through the minister of public instruction, has the veto power over every election, and the further fact that the institution is directly dependent upon the state for its revenues. Few have endowments of any considerable value, and no fixed percentage of the state revenues are allotted by statute or constitutional provision to the university as is the case in many of our states. The veto power is, however, seldom exercised in a way to infringe upon the liberty of teaching, or in the sense of political spoils. In a

few states, where autocratic methods have been in vogue in politics, the same principle extends to the universities, but these states are exceptions. The institutions of higher learning in Latin America, whether universities or detached departments of professional schools, are all state institutions. They may have had their beginnings far back in colonial times and been originally chartered by the church, but they have been completely secularized and now owe allegiance to the state only. Further, they are more than mere academic bodies. They not only train for the professions, but their degrees virtually confer the sanction to exercise the professions. They are the state's agents for the administration of the so-called learned professions.

It is true that the Roman Catholic Church in Chile and also in Argentine maintains a Catholic university comprising certain faculties, but these universities have no power to grant professional licenses. In this sense, the state in Latin America maintains a monopoly of higher, or at least of professional education.

There is still another bond that links the Latin-American university with the state that is foreign to North American customs. Notwithstanding the fact that a teacher by profession and but recently a college president sits in the White House at Washington, it is nevertheless true that academic life in the United States has run in quite different channels from the political life. Not so in Latin America. There statecraft and the professorate have been closely allied. A man of talent easily passes from the professor's chair to political administration and as easily returns. The Latin-American professor is seldom devoted to research as a vocation. It may be an avocation. (I have already noted that there are no graduate schools strictly speaking.) His teaching is practical in that it aims simply to prepare for a profession. Moreover, the professor does not limit his activities to the university. He practices a profession at the same time. In fact his teaching is secondary. He is first of all lawyer, physician, engineer, journalist or agriculturist. His lectures of three or six hours per week are a by-product of his activities. As an educated, cultivated citizen, he is therefore



easily available for a political position. It would not appear incongruous to us that professors in the law school should easily gain political preferment; but that professors of medicine, engineering, pharmacy and other technical subjects should be directly in line for political positions is to the North American an anomaly. To understand the situation it must be remembered that in Latin American the professions are filled almost exclusively by the aristocracy, and it is by virtue of this fact that physicians, engineers, and others, who are at the same time professors are called to political life. It is not so much that the university contributes to the political life of the country as that the personnel of the university is recruited from the same class that directs the state. The interchange of functions is therefore most natural and facile. With us, it has often been a cause for regret that our higher education has few points in common with our political activities. Our tradition is not wholly an evil; our policies suffer somewhat probably, but there are compensations.

The internal organization resembles that of a European university. There is a dean of each college chosen annually by the professors. He is seldom reëlected, as it is the custom to rotate the office. He is assisted by a small council also chosen by the professors. The head of the entire university, the rector, is elected by the professorship. He, like the deans, seldom serves for a long time. There is also a university council composed of representatives from all the faculties. The council has legislative powers for the entire institution, and it arranges the budget for the university, distributing the funds among the various colleges.

Notwithstanding the existence of the university council and the rector, who represent the entire institution, a Latin-American university is a far less unified body than a North American state university. Each department is inclined to lead its own life apart. The council is not as unifying an agency as a board of trustees, and the rector who holds office for but a year perhaps and then returns to his professional chair is not the important centralizing figure that the North American university president is. He has neither

the prominence nor the authority. The different colleges may be located in widely separated districts of the city. The university organization is, therefore, often only nominal. Hence, the practice of omitting it entirely and conducting the departments as separate institutions under the minister of public institutions, as in Brazil, Bolivia and Guatemala.

#### TEACHERS AND TEACHING

The fact that the Latin-American professor is rarely a teacher by profession has far-reaching effects on the character of the teaching body and still greater on the character and scope of the teaching. In the first place, it fills the professional chairs with men of the highest class of society. They may not be erudite, but they are the most cultured of the nation. They give the university a dignity that could not, in countries where rank in society counts for so much, be imparted by mere erudition. Since the great majority of the students are of the same social class and since the teaching lacks the technical and burdensome detail that a scholar might introduce, there exists a community of spirit between students and professors not so common with us, and this tends to create a corporate sentiment, such as existed in the mediaeval universities.

As the professor has active vocations, which he considers more vital than his lectures, he cannot be held to regular attendance. A professor who gives four-fifths of his lectures is considered a model of regularity. Not infrequently he is absent one-half the time, and the annual report of the institutions will include a table of professors' attendance. To remedy the matter, each chair is provided with a substitute professor, who may be called by the administration to fill the place of the absentee, in the event his absence is foreseen and reported.

The curriculum is divided into a great number of courses and each course has its professor. He usually gives three lectures a week. If the course includes laboratory work, this exercise is conducted by a laboratory assistant, who has neither the rank nor dignity of a professor. This sharp

distinction between lecture and laboratory reacts unfavorably on the latter. Since the professor does not give it his personal supervision, the student is tempted to regard the laboratory as of lesser importance. Especially is this true in engineering, where the laboratory exercises approach the conditions of common manual labor. The class distinctions which are so sharp in most South American countries almost debar an engineering student from certain laboratory exercises that form the veritable basis of his profession.

The teaching consists almost uniformly of formal lectures; class discussions are rare, and questions and answers on an assigned topic still more so. However, the Latin-American student is not averse to these latter methods. The liveliest class I witnessed was conducted by the class discussion method on an assigned topic.

The common lecture method of teaching necessarily throws great emphasis upon the final examination. Attendance on the part of the students upon lectures and even upon laboratory exercises is nowhere strictly enforced. There are seldom written or oral examinations during the year.

The great emphasis is laid upon the year-end examinations. During the last month, lectures are relaxed, if not discontinued altogether. Sometimes this is by tradition and is at the option of the professor; sometimes it is by formal university statute. This month is allotted to the student in order that he may prepare for his final year-end examination. Each student is examined individually and orally in each subject. There may be also a written examination, but it is the oral test that is the great event. It takes place before a *jury* of three professors. The student draws by lot a certain number of topics which he develops, and in addition he may be asked questions by any member of the jury. The jury ballots secretly on the grade to be assigned. If the candidate passes, he is promoted to the next class. If he is conditioned, he may apply for another examination before the opening of the next session. If he fails, he must remain in the same class another year and the period of his graduation is thus deferred a year.

The organization of a Latin-American university as out-

lined above necessarily produces certain conditions, which are striking to a North American.

The assignment of but a single course to a professor requires a relatively large faculty. An institution of less than three hundred students may have as many as forty professors, not including the substitutes and the laboratory assistants. The pay roll, therefore, will be a long one, but the total expenditures will not be greater than in the United States. In proportion to the time he devotes to teaching, the Latin-American professor is paid about the average salary of the North American professor. The stipend varies greatly however in different countries.

Since the student enters the professional school directly from the secondary school, the length of the professional course is long as compared with our practice. In medicine, six and seven years; in law five or six years; in engineering, four, five and six years. The last years in the medical college are devoted almost wholly to clinical study and practice and, therefore, take the place of the post-graduation internship. The law course is much broader and more comprehensive than the average course in the United States, including as it does, political science, history and philosophy of law and international law.

On account of the close relation existing between the professorate and the political administration, and also on account of the students coming from families that compose the governing class, the university is a strong center of political influence. In the olden time when commercial influence counted for little and even today in these countries least affected by economic ideas, the university is the most potent force in politics.

#### PRODUCT

The almost total disappearance from the university of the college of letters and philosophy should not lead to the conclusion that all Latin-American graduates are devoting themselves only to the professions. In Latin America a professional course, especially in law, is a traditional liberal

education. Not more than one-half of the graduates, even of the medical schools, enter upon the practice of the profession. The sons of landed proprietors return to the administration of their estates; others turn their attention to journalism, governmental administration, etc.

Neither should it be concluded that because higher education is compressed into professional schools, that the liberal culture is lacking. The secondary school curriculum embraces the elements of subjects not usually attempted in the United States in schools of this grade—economics and philosophy are almost everywhere taught in the last year of the Latin-American high school. It is true that the classics rarely have a place, but on the other hand, modern foreign languages, always two and sometimes three, are taught throughout the entire course. In the professional schools, too, many subjects are included that with us are found only in the pre-professional college course. In law, psychology, history, economics, finance and sociology; in medicine, general courses in botany, zoölogy, physics, etc.; in engineering, general courses in the physical sciences. Besides, the whole trend of the professional courses is toward a broader education than would be a professional course with us, were it not preceded by the college. Especially is this so in law. The stress universally laid upon Roman law and the customs that were the base of it compensates for the omission of classical studies, while the importance ascribed to the history and philosophy of law and to international law gives a breadth of view not usually obtained in our relatively narrow law curriculum. The fact that Latin America has produced more than her share of eminent international lawyers is a direct effect of the type of legal training in vogue. Indeed the law school is the college of liberal arts in Latin America. Its curriculum has supplanted in large part the department of philosophy and its students are there quite as much for liberal culture as for professional training.

Latin-American universities look abroad for post-graduate study; to Europe principally for law, medicine and general culture; to the United States principally for engineering and dentistry. In agriculture the honors are more equally di-

vided. Almost every country maintains a considerable number of fellowships for foreign study, to say nothing of the large number of young men who go abroad for study on their own account.

This dependence upon foreign countries for advanced studies and also for ideals in art, science, literature and social progress has its disadvantages for Latin America. Native ideas are often mistrusted and as a consequence initiative in the higher things of life is discouraged. Strong characters, who would work reforms social and economic, are looked upon as dreamers; the weaker men become pessimistic in the face of the greater local difficulties. A recent work of South American fiction portrays such a returned scholar who finds conditions at home so difficult as compared with what he has seen abroad, that he loses his patriotism and declines to help the fatherland whose pensioner he has been for years. I am certain that such a person is not an empty imagination of the author. The situation is a perplexing one. Latin America needs graduate study for its leaders in science, but the traveling fellow often loses on one side as much as he gains on the other. Sympathy with his own people and with home conditions is as necessary for the public man as knowledge of the sciences themselves.

Real graduate study cannot progress in Latin America until university teaching becomes a distinct profession. The teacher who gives three hours per week of his time to the class and the rest to non-academic pursuits may be a good teacher for a professional school, but he can never become the scholar that the graduate school demands. The best prospect for the development of this grade of instruction (at least in some lines) is at the University of La Plata. This institution is of very recent foundation and takes pride in being different from its neighbors. It has tried to break away from the professional tradition and to stimulate research and an academic atmosphere.

Aside from this institution, however, the tendency in Latin-American universities today is to accentuate the professional and the practical. In the University of Buenos Aires, the largest in Latin America, the department of phi-

losophy and letters is the only department that is not growing. Elsewhere it either does not exist or is stagnant. The emphasis is all laid on professional schools, particularly on the colleges of engineering and agriculture. However the enrollment is not the largest here. Young men still enroll in excessive numbers for the professions of law and medicine, although the authorities, both university and political, are urging students toward the more commercial vocations of engineering and agriculture. These schools receive large appropriations and are fostered in every conceivable way. It is not easy, however, to thwart a tradition. The so-called learned professions still receive the larger quota of the university population. It is only where commercial life has become intense that the predilection for the time-honored law course has begun to lessen.